

A New



Father's Voice:

*A collection of experiences and articles
especially for new dads*

By Jeremy G. Schneider, MFT

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Introduction

Congratulations!!! Becoming a new dad will be one of – if not the - greatest experience of your life. Your life is about to be irrevocably changed, but not all for the good or bad. Sure, you will have less sleep and less time with your partner, but you will develop the most pure relationship any human can create. Your love and affection and warmth and admiration and enjoyment of your child will make a difference in his/her life that will last for as long as they live. Yes, there is pressure in becoming a dad, but try to think of it as an opportunity. You really can make a difference by being the best dad you can be.

A New Father's Voice is a collection of some of my favorite articles written especially for new dads. In addition, each article has a special introduction explaining the inspiration for each piece. It is the accumulation of knowledge I try to share with new fathers in my workshops and classes. It is what I think every new father needs to know. It is what I wish someone would've told me and lessons I wish I had understood earlier on in the fathering process. If this book can help you or a father you know more easily overcome some of the enormous challenges involved in becoming a new dad, then this book will have achieved its goal.

The other reason I have put this collection together is because fathers who are involved with their children, who are caring, affectionate, accepting, and unconditionally love their children, have more intelligent, more socially competent, better performing children who are more likely to grow up into adults who are more satisfied with their lives and more likely to be in healthy romantic relationships. That's a lot of power we fathers have and this power starts right when our child leaves the womb.

Use your power wisely, dad, for you really will make a difference.

This first piece came about because before I became a father all I could think about was what I was going to lose, what having a child would mean negatively in my life; no time with my wife, no sleep, etc. What I never understood was all that I would gain once my children were born. This piece is about, and entitled, What I Have Instead.

What I Have Instead

I fantasize about the life my wife and I would have if we were free to travel wherever we wanted. If we were free to go out to dinner together, see a movie, go to museums without worrying about who is watching our children and feeling guilty for leaving. The time we would have to actually talk, share our lives, getting to know each other all over again. I imagine we would be doing so many fun and interesting things together rather than arguing over how we will figure out where to live and how to afford it while sending our kids to school for the first time. The stress of having children, trying to do what's best for them, providing for them is a dominating force in our relationship. Without that, I can only imagine what our relationship would be like. Becoming a parent really has changed everything and there are times when I'm left wondering about all that I am missing.



But life is all about choices, about taking a certain path rather than standing at the fork unsure of what to do. To have my life different than it is now would have some benefits, but it would result in some terrible losses as well. But this is what prospective parents - especially men - have a difficult time understanding. Before and during my wife's pregnancy, all I could see about having children was

the cost, the negative impact on our marriage and the lack of freedom it would inflict on our lives. They have all come true. But my wife seemed to understand many of the positive aspects of having children, which I was clueless about. That made it very difficult for me to imagine why we would want to do this and that I could ever be ready for it.

But since my children were born, since I've been able to hold them in my arms, since I've been able to interact with them, I have come to realize so many of the good things about having children. I am experiencing the benefits, the positive side of having children, of having a family and I would never go back - even if I could.

I can close my eyes, even on this train, and hear my children laugh. That is one of the most beautiful sounds I have ever heard - especially if they are laughing because of something I did. The sound is the expression of pure joy, unadulterated, unencumbered, unfiltered, different than the way most of life's joys are. It is so powerful that I feel joyous; I feel love - something that was often lacking from my childhood experience.

I marvel at how much my children learn and grow on a daily basis. Watching them experience something for the first time is awe inspiring. The way they each try to take in the new environment, try to absorb their surroundings, the way they react to a new place is thoroughly enjoyable. Then seeing how they integrate it with the other things they know is fascinating. Children's brains grow at such a rapid rate that it challenges us to just keep up with them. But a good kind of challenge, a very fun and exciting one.

Experiencing them show their affection and love to me is nothing like I have ever known. When my daughter caresses my face, I almost always tear up. My heart swells when Elijah puts his hand on my shoulder while we are reading at bedtime. They are learning love and how to love from my wife and I and a loving family is the best feeling in the world. I had no idea I could feel such intense joy, happiness, or love from being with my children. I didn't get that part, didn't understand, and couldn't see how this could be possible before they were born - I only saw the stress and overwhelming responsibility. I thought I would have to give and give and give to them. But they give back in their own way - especially if I am open to receiving.

I think about my wife, about how she is the most loving person I have ever known. How she has worked so hard to be there for our children every single day for the past three years - often by herself, with not enough sleep. I think that while we have to work so much harder to keep our relationship strong, I wouldn't want to share this experience with anyone else in the entire world. We are stronger because of our children, because we are bigger than ourselves. We are a family now, the loving, caring family we always wanted.

When I didn't have children, I would try to envision my life with children and my stomach would get tense and upset. I would get anxious thinking of all I would lose, all I didn't know. But since I've had children, our children, my children, I hear songs or watch shows where the divorced father only sees his children every other weekend and it hurts, genuinely causes me pain to think I could be without my children. I can't envision my life without them. Being a father has become such a huge part of who I am, I can't imagine my life any other way. I may have given up a lot to take this path, but I have gained so much just from the journey alone.

I always believed fathers were important, but I honestly didn't even understand how valuable and crucial we are in the lives of our children until I started reviewing the research. Most of the studies on fatherhood are pretty conclusive - involved fathers make a huge difference in the lives of their children in a number of different areas; school, social competence, relationships and even future life satisfaction as adults.

Don't Believe the Hype! Good Fathers Make the Difference

It is a myth. Don't believe it. Don't buy into it, fellow fathers. It is just not true. Mothers are not, by nature, better parents than fathers. In fact, good fathers are just as important as good mothers to the well-being of their children and in some areas have a greater impact on their children than mothers do. This is not to say, of course, mothers don't contribute an enormous amount to the health and welfare of their children. However, the myth that fathers are only assistants to mothers, that they fill in when Mommy is not around needs to be contradicted in ways that both mothers and fathers understand. Stronger, more involved fathers can only help mothers be stronger as well. It is an issue important to all of us parents – regardless of our gender.

Despite what we read in “parenting” magazines, the role of fathers is crucial to our children. Most of the research on fathers has focused on the love we give our children, our acceptance of our children and our involvement with our children. According to a number of studies, if your child feels loved by you, Dad, accepted by you and feels you are involved in their life, then they are much more likely to be healthier, happier, and more satisfied with life – no matter what kind of mother they have.

This means that if we love and accept our children unconditionally, consistently (not sporadically) showing them how we feel about them, consistently being involved in what they are doing, our children have a much better chance of being happier and healthier as children, but also as adults. Healthier, happier people have healthier relationships and are better parents. By our actions now, we have a chance to create healthy traditions in our family that will be a gift for future generations to come. Our children are depending on us to help ensure their future and all they need from us is our love, acceptance and involvement.

It is important to fully understand the idea of involvement when it comes to your children. Most fathers understand how important love and acceptance are to children, but not as many fully comprehend what involvement really means. If I work, many fathers ask, and have to spend time away from my kids, how can I be involved enough with them? Involvement is often measured not by how much time you spend with your children, but the *quality* of time you spend with them. Involvement means interacting with your children. It means asking them how they are doing, what did they do that day when you weren't around. It means meeting their needs when you can, like dressing them, changing them, taking them to bed. It means when you are around, you are an important part of their lives, that you are involved with them and their care. Even if the amount of time is only on the weekend or a few hours a week, the quality of your time with them is what makes a difference.

Interestingly, the research on father love and involvement seems to indicate good fathers are like an ace up the sleeve of their children. Children with good mothers have a pretty good chance of being healthy and happy, but if they don't have a good father, if they don't feel loved or accepted by their father they are more likely to have eating disorders, to be unhappy, to use drugs, to perform poorly in school. The lack of a good father can have devastating effects for children. However, with good fathers the opposite is more likely. Good fathers can help children excel in academics, develop higher levels of social competence, and even better life satisfaction among many other benefits.

I think this has to do with the lack of good fathers out there; good fathers make their children stand out more. Ironically, if we follow this line of thought, as fathers continue to get better at parenting the value of good fathers will be harder to see in the research. Why? Because there will be significantly fewer people with eating disorders, fewer unhappy and unsatisfied people, and fewer children with academic difficulties.

We fathers can make a gigantic difference in the lives of our children. We have the power to parent for good, for their health and happiness. What we do will not only make their lives better, but will make the lives of our grandchildren and great-grandchildren healthier and happier as well.

We have the power, fellow fathers. Go and use it well.

This is a more practical piece about dealing with the challenges of those first few weeks. The fact is priorities change and what had been important before becomes less so because you have a new member of your family. You can't do everything at first and it is important to focus on what is most important in those first few weeks, until things become a bit more manageable.

8 Pieces of Advice for a New Father

A colleague of mine called into the office to inform us his wife gave birth to a little girl. He then asked me if I had any advice for him. There was so much I wanted to say yet so little I thought I could really explain that I don't think I said anything at all. If only we could've performed a mind meld.

But after having some time to think about it, I've come up with a few things.

1. *Sleep when she sleeps* - A simple rule of thumb is, "Is she sleeping? Then I should, too." I can remember waking up to the sound of one of our children crying and looking at the clock, seeing 3:00 and not knowing whether it was early morning or afternoon and realizing it didn't matter.
2. *Forget about cleaning up* - Having a clean house is what should now be referred to as a luxury. We went to a friends' house the other day and they have two children under four. While I was impressed that her house looked so clean, she was apologizing for it being dirty. I realized it looked clean because there was nothing on the floor to trip on and many free places to sit. Your baby won't care whether the house is clean or not and any family or friends who visit will truly understand - especially if they have children themselves.
3. *Perspective shift* - Without trying to sound melodramatic, everything you knew about your life before will be different now. My wife and I now think in terms of before and after. The funny part is we think of things we did before our children were born and have trouble remembering how we did so much without them. Even movies seem different though we've seen them so many times already; having children has changed even the way we experience movies because we understand a major part of life - parenthood - that we had no idea about before.
4. *Throw out expectations* - I had been working out at least three times a week for over a year. It took me 18 months before I was able to start again. And I punished myself everyday for failing to work out. But it was terribly unrealistic to expect it. I thought I would be able to do things I had done before they were born, but there is an adjustment period as I transitioned from my old life to my new one. This is a completely new situation that no one can prepare you for and it is best to just focus first on caring for your daughter and wife.
5. *Supportive role* - I had only held a baby once or twice in my life and had never changed a diaper by the time my children were born. But I understood, especially with my wife breastfeeding, that my primary role was to support her. Most new mothers become so intently focused on taking care of their new baby and meeting their every need that they unintentionally neglect themselves. But to meet the nutritional and emotional needs of a baby mothers need energy and rest. I made sure she ate and drank her fluids. I kept making sure she got as

much rest as she could. By supporting her, I was aiding in the bond she was building with them, strengthening our bond and also taking steps to building my own bond with my children. And honestly, it also gave me a chance to learn from her.

6. *Reprioritizing* - I wanted to be a great father. I also wanted to do well at work, lose weight and take care of my physical health, make sure I was okay psychologically, and be a good husband. There was no way I could do it all though I tried. Part of the new father process involves reprioritizing so that you can focus your limited energy on what you need to do to take care of your family and yourself.
7. *Practice, practice, practice* - One of the reasons I can do so much more now than in the beginning is because I know so much more now about being a Daddy and managing my new life. If you're like most new fathers, you don't really know anything about taking care of a baby. But soon it won't take 30 minutes to change a diaper or to get a bottle ready. With repetition comes a sense of ease at handling many of the daily tasks that are involved with raising a baby. As I got more and more accomplished at these daily tasks, I found I had a little extra energy because I didn't have to concentrate so much on each and every task (and wasn't worried I was going to screw it up).
8. *Difficulty connecting* - Mothers have an advantage when it comes to connecting with a new baby because they carried it for nine months. This connection can be very strong. Fathers often don't experience the same connection after their baby is born. This lack of an immediate strong connection can be very disturbing to many fathers - especially if they expect to have a close relationship with their child. This lack of immediate connection doesn't mean there is anything wrong with you or that it doesn't matter what you do - it absolutely does. You will build your relationship with your little girl just like you build any other relationship. By being there for her, talking to her, holding her, and taking care of her you will soon find that the connection between the two of you is growing. By the time she starts to speak you'll marvel that you once didn't feel strongly connected to her.

To me this is probably the most important thing for new fathers to know. Many fathers, when their child is born, are not struck by lightning filled with intense love and affection for their new baby. In fact, for many it is just like meeting someone they have never met before – except this person cannot talk or respond or interact in any way and this person is rather demanding. But as long as you stay involved and try to build a bond with your baby, you will find each and every day your connection to your new baby gets stronger and stronger and before long you won't believe you didn't feel the powerful connection you have come to feel.

For Expecting Fathers, Don't Expect an Immediate Connection

The first few months of fatherhood can often be the most difficult. But these are vital months in the relationships with your partner and child. Your baby arrives along with expectations of what it will be like to be a father. Many of these expectations often involve holding your baby and feeling a strong connection, a powerful sense of love. While that will undoubtedly happen, it may take a bit longer than you originally thought. Instead of a few days, it could take a few months.

Mothers get a head start on connecting and building a relationship with their baby because of experiencing the fetus growing. So much goes on in her body during the pregnancy and these changes often can help her feel a relationship develop along with the baby.

Even once baby is born, fathers can feel a strange emptiness, a blankness inside. They know the baby they are holding is theirs, but it doesn't feel like their baby, it feels like they are strangers. They may *know* they love their baby, but not *feel* it, yet. Instead of feeling love and warmth, many fathers find themselves feeling afraid, under more pressure to make money, and exhausted from the lack of sleep. Some may even feel inadequate or useless as fathers, that if they disappear it wouldn't matter. These difficult feelings can be exacerbated if the father is working outside the home while the mother is taking care of their baby full-time.



Another reason the first months are hardest for men is an infant doesn't do anything, but needs a lot. Parents, but fathers especially, may feel they are giving a lot without "receiving" anything in return, like a smile or time playing together. There isn't as much visible return on their time investment. Babies sleep, eat, poop and then sleep some more – not always in that order.

The sad truth is many fathers have this experience, but are afraid to talk about it. Not talking about it creates a sense of shame, as if there really is something wrong with a

father (or a mother) who doesn't feel an immediate connection to their baby. But instead of feeling shame and giving up, fathers need to remain involved and create opportunities for a connection with their baby to develop. If you experience something similar, that doesn't mean you're a bad father or that you don't or can't love your child. It means while you probably understand on some level that you love your new baby, you may not yet feel the tremendous sense of love and connection you thought you would or should feel.

What many fathers don't realize is that this connection often comes with time. In many ways, you need to get to know your new baby and she needs to get to know you. While your partner experienced your baby growing, she only became a reality for you when she was born. Soon you will look at her face and see it scrunch a certain way or the way she moves her arms when she hears a sound and something will flutter in your chest. Before you know it, you will feel such a strong connection you will have trouble remembering life before when you didn't feel this way. The feeling only builds exponentially from there.

The best way to get through those first few months is to remember that every moment you spend with your baby is an investment. You may not receive immediate rewards, but benefits will come. The more time you spend with your baby, the more familiar you become to your baby, and the more confident you will feel as a father.

Try not to let any day go by without Daddy Time. You and your partner can set up a specific time every day that you always have with your child - Daddy Time. And make sure everyone in both your families know, so no one intrudes upon that special time. Daddy Time can involve any number of things including:

- **Hold your baby.** You don't have to do anything. Just hold her. Try kangaroo care; hold your baby bare chest to bare chest. She may even fall asleep like that. In fact, you may do that as well.
- **Feed your baby** if possible (if your partner is breastfeeding, ask her to pump a little bit every day so you can give your baby a bottle) just the two of you sharing some Daddy time. She needs to know that you, too, can take care of her hunger needs.
- **Take a walk** with her in a baby carrier or sling or if you don't have one of those, take her out in a stroller
- **Read or talk or sing to your baby.** She needs to hear the sound of your voice so anything you read is most likely fine.
- **Hold your partner while she holds your baby.** This is another good way to build intimacy - closeness - in your family.
- **Change diapers/dress your baby** - Just like with feeding her, she needs to know you can meet these other needs that she can't do on her own.
- **Trim her nails** - The finger and toenails of babies grow pretty fast and cause quite a bit of damage to themselves and their parents. You'd be doing everyone a favor.

This is another of those lessons I wish I had learned earlier. Doing everything I had done before we had our children after they were born turned out to be impossible. I thought it should've been possible and didn't understand why I was having so much trouble. Of course, looking back it makes perfect sense why it was so hard, but at the time I was too overwhelmed to even realize it. Don't expect to be able to do everything you did before your baby was born. Focus on your new baby and gradually try to incorporate the things, like working out for instance, that you still want to do from before your little one was born.

Juggling Life as a New Father

For a year after my twins were born, I kept getting withdrawal slips for my time and energy, but my account had already been depleted. It became impossible to juggle all of the priorities in my life and things fell by the wayside. It took more than twelve months before I felt like I was able to even keep up with all of the changes in my life.

The biggest challenge was there were still the same number of hours in the day, but I had so much more to do in the same amount of time. In order to keep my job and earn money to support my family – especially since my wife was home taking care of our children, I had to work just as hard, but on less sleep. But to be a good father and to build a connection with my children, I needed to be home as much as possible. This created the challenge of having to complete the same amount of work, with the same level of accuracy, in less time, so I could go home earlier.

Of course, being home was far from a break. I had so much to learn as a father and it was physically, emotionally and mentally exhausting - not too mention the lack of sleep. I had never changed a diaper by the time my children were born. I don't even think I had held a baby before they came into my life. I no longer had down time at home anymore and certainly didn't have the same level of energy, focus and mental abilities as I did before my children were born. But many things I used to do without much effort were now too difficult to do. Working out? I was barely sleeping for eleven months, how could I even consider working out? I did try. I can't tell you how many times I thought about it and even a few times I set the alarm clock to get up early, but I just couldn't do it. I would press snooze until it was time to get ready for work all the while cursing myself out for not getting up. Hobbies? Hanging out with friends? I was too busy learning how to change diapers, to soothe screaming children, to exist on little-to-no sleep. It seemed as if I had lost the higher functioning capabilities of my brain. I was more of a worn out wind-up toy, just point me in the right direction and if there was anything left, I would move forward. No creativity. No brainstorming. No insight. No ideas. I was working so hard at just surviving, just getting through, I had nothing left to experience life, to actually live. Those months are such a blur that I only remember them when I really concentrate.

It wasn't just the big things like working out that I wasn't able to do anymore. Even smaller things that didn't involve much time also became difficult. It was so difficult to keep in touch with friends and family, which made me feel isolated and alone. For a man who more than once had been called a control-freak, I felt I had no control at all. I

couldn't exercise, but I couldn't stop eating things like chocolate either. At the office, anyone who needed a chocolate fix knew where to go – my desk where I had a chocolate drawer. Things that needed to be done, that in the past were never a problem, became huge challenges. I was late paying bills which I had always been very good about. I felt like I was changing for the worse and I didn't like who I was becoming.

To make matters worse the lack of working out and the incredible increase in my consumption of chocolate caused me to gain what I refer to as the "Twin Twenty." My clothes stopped fitting comfortably and I absolutely did not like the way I looked in the mirror. But I couldn't seem to do anything to stop it from happening. So many things were happening to me and I couldn't keep up. I was too busy beating myself up for not being able to function like I did before my children were born to understand what was going on.

Fortunately, when they started to sleep better at night, around 11 months, I began to have conscious thoughts once again. I was able to think about more than how was I going to get through today and could think about short-term future plans. Plus, I was getting a little more sleep and that really does make a difference. I also was getting better at being a Daddy. There were many things I could literally do in my sleep that I used to have to really concentrate on to complete like changing diapers, feeding and getting them dressed. Using less energy for those things freed up some energy for things I wasn't able to do before. I still wasn't able to work out but I was getting better about being more responsible again; it helped that I had a better idea of what day and date it was than before. Frustratingly, I still was having difficulty exercising any willpower.

But this clearing of my mind did allow me to begin to understand what had been happening to me. I was completely maxed out trying to be a good employee while working fewer hours and trying to be a good husband and Daddy in the few hours I had with my family that I had nothing left to take care of anything else - including me. When my children were born, I found myself with too many high level priorities in my life at the exact moment when I had the least time and energy I've ever had. Things had to give and they did.

Finally, at around sixteen months, I felt like I had walked out of a long, dark tunnel. Thankfully, the light at the end wasn't an oncoming train, but life. For fifteen months I had spent almost every single ounce of energy I had on just trying to survive. Now, I was able to live life once again. Because work and being a father and husband were taking a little less energy, I was able to move exercising up on my priority list and move sleep down a notch. Now I sleep less so I can work out, but I need less sleep because I have a better handle on many other things. It's a trade-off, but I have a choice whereas for months I was lucky I didn't get hit by a car crossing the street I was so out of it.

I'm really beginning to feel better and experience life again - including enjoying my children more. I even feel like I am beginning to build up a little savings for whatever comes next.

This is how I began to be able to do everything I wanted to do, build my business, work out, take care of my mental health, while still being as involved with my children and family as possible. This piece will walk you through the process of determining your priorities and rating them so you can more easily see what is most important to you and how best to spend your limited time.

Ever Shifting Priorities: Managing Our Goals and Priorities on A Daily Basis

It is harder than ever for parents to focus and manage the important goals in their lives while trying to deal with everything that happens in a single day. We all have goals, but they often get lost in the day-to-day chaos many of us parents live in. I'm not talking about your daily tasks such as groceries, laundry, work projects, etc. No, what I mean is your overarching goals, the goals for your life and your family. What are your career goals? Do you want to change jobs or start a business? What can you do today to help make that happen? What are your goals for your physical health and the health of your family? To eat healthier? To exercise more? How important is being a great parent in relation to these other goals? Do you have a hobby that is important you? How important is it in relation to your other goals? There are two vital elements to being able to effectively manage our own overarching goals and needs on a daily basis.

1. The first and obviously incredibly important element is knowing what your goals are and prioritizing them.
 - Write them down clearly with a good definition so you can be sure what you mean by each goal. Keep them with you if you need to do so.
 - I suggest you might even want to rate them. Is being a great parent worth not spending as much time at work as other people and thus maybe not moving up the ladder? Are hobbies more important than your relationship with your spouse? Maybe not, but are they more important than work? These are tough but very important questions. It is much easier to answer them now, without stress, than to try and figure it out during the day-to-day pressure of living our crazy lives.
 - Just having a list of what your important goals are will make a huge difference because all of sudden when you have decisions to make you will find yourself beginning to think of them in terms of whether or not it helps you meet your overall goals and needs.

To give you an idea of my overall life goals and the activities I do on a daily basis to try and achieve them, I included mine below as an example. They are in no particular order.

- Being physically healthy (includes sleep, rest, eating healthy, exercising)
- Building my practice (includes working to better enjoy what I do and to provide for my family)
- Being mentally/emotionally healthy (includes rest, sleep, reading, relaxation, downtime)
- Doing a good enough job at work – I view this as being a subset of being a good husband and father (includes keeping my job to support my family)
- A strong, healthy marriage (includes quality time to talk, intimacy, sex, going

away just the two of us)

- A strong, healthy relationship with each of my children (includes quality time with my children – not just stressful evenings before they go to bed)

If you have a hobby, you could include that, too. For instance, I would love to play golf, but haven't really figured out how to make time for it, which tells me it is not as important to me as the other things on my list. This, of course, is true.

2. The second element necessary to effectively managing our priorities is a continuing self-assessment of our needs based on our priorities.
 - For instance, when I'm feeling run down, I always try to take extra vitamins, get extra rest and cut down on my exercise so I can get extra sleep. Even though in the short run, I fall behind on my writing and exercising, in the long run I'll get more done if I don't get sick. The main goal is staying healthy because I function so much better when I am not sick and it allows me to achieve my other goals. Sometimes I just need to let my mind be and enjoy reading a good book. Again, it is the same situation. If my brain gets tired or I get too stressed out, I won't be able to achieve everything I want to because I won't be functioning as well. The trick is trying to keep seeing the bigger picture so as not to get too caught up in the daily grind and lose focus.

Here are my overall goals after ranking them with a brief explanation as to why I rated them in that order. The most interesting, and challenging, part of ranking them is my goals, like yours, too, probably, are not separate and distinct from each other. Some are vital to achieving the others.

1. Being mentally/emotionally healthy (includes rest, sleep, reading, relaxation, downtime)
 - When I am emotionally healthy, I can achieve almost anything.
2. Being physically healthy (includes sleep, rest, eating healthy, exercising)
 - If I am not physically healthy, I will fail at most of the things on this list
3. A strong, healthy marriage (includes quality time to talk, intimacy, sex, going away just the two of us)
 - My marriage is the central relationship in my life and it is the core of our family. As our marriage goes, so goes our family. In addition, I want my children to grow up with a healthy model for relationships
4. A strong, healthy relationship with each of my children (includes quality time with my children – not just stressful evenings before they go to bed)
 - There is no other reason to have children in my mind except to be the best role model and develop the strongest relationship possible so they have the best chance of growing up healthy and happy.
5. Building my practice (includes working to better enjoy what I do and to provide for my family)
 - Doing something I feel passionate about will make me a better person which will make me better as a husband and father
6. Doing a good enough job at work (includes keeping my job to support my family)
 - If I don't provide for my family, then we will all be in a lot of trouble. We still have to eat, have a roof over our heads and clothes on our bodies. And they

really like toys and videos, too.

Ranking my priorities essentially provides me with a game plan for how to deal with life's complicated situations. It gives me the framework for viewing my world that helps me stay focused even during chaotic times. It can do the same for you.

Prioritizing what's important to you will help you focus more of your time and energy on the things you most care about, instead of the things you think you should or ought to do. This way you'll enjoy them more and that's good for everyone in your family.

Don't ever doubt the power and influence you have on your child. You are very important to them and your future and you really can make a difference in their life. Fathers who know they matter to their children, are more involved with in their children's lives. Know you matter and get involved.

Education Can Break Damaging Father Stereotypes

Probably the most damaging aspect of father stereotypes that depict them as bumbling or unnecessary is that it reinforces itself. Fathers do have a tremendous impact on their children. But these stereotypes, societal expectations, often make fathers feel like what they are doing is not as important as what the mother does. If fathers think what they do is not as important as mothers, then they won't try as hard, make as much of an effort, or be present as much as they can for their children. This, of course, leads them to being distant and unfamiliar with the caretaking responsibilities of their children, reinforcing these terrible stereotypes. A crucial way of getting fathers more involved is to help them understand how important they are as a parent to their children and to provide them with concrete steps they can do to improve as a parent.

Research indicates three components make it more likely for men to be involved as fathers. Men are more likely to become involved as fathers...

1. If they believe the paternal role is important
2. If they feel being a father is a major part of their identity
3. If they feel confident and competent as a parent

As you can probably clearly see, knowledge, information, and education make a significant contribution to whether or not fathers possess or develop those characteristics. In fact, there have been studies that found once fathers begin to learn they really do have a tremendous impact on the health and happiness of their children, they become more involved as fathers - probably because they feel what they are doing makes a difference.

We all want to feel important. For men, that feeling has often been easier to achieve in the workplace than in the home. For mothers, traditionally, the opposite has been true. Ironically, for fathers to be more involved at home, they need to spend less time where they have historically felt important and enter into a new arena. But mothers also then need to step back and share the parental roles with their partner, giving up some of what has historically been their comfort zone. For some parents this shift is much easier than others and there are many variables that affect this shift, such as the parents own relationship, their childhood, relationship with their own parents, earnings from working, etc.

Knowing fathers do have a positive impact on their children is especially important when they go through challenging periods. For instance, one of the challenges fathers of infants may face is a lack of immediate connection to their baby. Many fathers feel they should have an incredible bond from the minute their infant comes home from the hospital, but often this powerful bond takes time. Fathers who are aware of the lack of

connection can lose confidence, can feel useless and unnecessary and focus on work more because at least that way they are supporting their family. Unfortunately, that only deepens the lack of connection. However, if fathers knew this lack of immediate connection was only a phase, if they knew how important they were to their baby's life, if they learned ways to shorten this phase, they would be more likely to stay involved during this phase.

Briefly, let's review some of the literature on the positive impact of involved fathers:

- The more paternal warmth – being warm/close with your child – children experience, the better they do academically and the more socially competent they are.
- Adolescents who are more satisfied with the level of paternal support they receive are less likely to become depressed
- A son's self-esteem is best predicted by sustained father physical contact (and mother's companionship) – the more contact, the higher their self-esteem.
- A daughter's self-esteem is best predicted by father affection (and maternal general support) – the more affection, the higher their self-esteem.
- The more children feel accepted by their father, the less likely they are to have conduct problems in school.
- Children who experienced substantial paternal (and maternal) love, are much less likely to use drugs.

Fathers, and mothers, need a better understanding of the power of parental involvement – especially father involvement. A better understanding for fathers could help them more easily overcome those moments when they feel that what they do doesn't matter instead of getting caught up in society's stereotypes of fathers.

The fact is, what we as fathers do does matter and our children need us to break through these negative stereotypes, these difficult periods, to know we are always there for them – not just during the fun times. This will be an investment in not just who they are now, but who they are to become.

Another important thing to remember is that you don't have to be a father the way your partner is a mother. You can do things your own way or learn new ways to interact with your child. The fact that you interact and treat your child differently is one of the many strengths you as a father bring to your child.

Fathers Are Not Like Mothers...But Together They Make A Great Team

There have been many studies that have examined the difference in parenting styles between mothers and fathers. The fact is mothers and fathers tend to have more similarities than differences when it comes to parenting their children. While that is important to note, it is also interesting to explore the differences between mothers and fathers to see how the combination of parenting styles really gives children an advantage.

Much of the research into parenting has been done with a baseline of what is normal or typical. Unfortunately, that baseline was developed from observing mothers for so many years. For quite some time, scientists evaluated fathers based on this baseline and then essentially graded fathers as wrong for doing it differently than mothers. But as we all try to teach our children every single day – different does not mean wrong. In fact, doing something differently can have some very positive benefits. This is why it is important to review the differences revealed in the research in parenting styles between mothers and fathers.

1. Type of Activity or how parents interact with their children.

Differences: Mothers tend to interact in more caregiving situations, while fathers tend to play more – particularly physical interactions like rolling on the floor, athletic activities, etc.

Benefits: These physical interactions help better connect children to their own bodies, increase their coordination, prepare them for the possibility of involvement in sports, while providing physical contact with their Daddy.

2. Verbal Exchanges between parent and child.

Differences: Mothers tend to be more repetitive and frequently ask questions and explain what things are to her child. Fathers verbalize less, are more focused on doing things together and their verbal interactions are more directive. Fathers also tend to be more demanding when it comes to language than mothers.

Benefits: Some researchers believe that having higher expectations better prepares children for settings outside the home and challenges them to work harder at articulating their wants and needs more effectively.

3. Patience with dependent behaviors

Difference: Fathers are less patient with children's dependent behaviors (crying out for help with things they can already do, etc.) – especially with their sons.

Benefits: If done in a healthy manner, could significantly contribute to developing the child's sense of independence and prepare them for separation from their parents.

4. Unconventional behaviors

Difference: Fathers tend to demonstrate more unconventional behaviors (such as teasing, joking around, more slapstick-type humor, etc.) than mothers. Fathers' behavior with children is less predictable.

Benefits: This has the advantage of mixing things up for the child, better preparing them once again for the outside world where things are not as predictable as they can be at home.

Individually each of these differences seems to bring out different qualities in their children, but probably the most important benefit of these differences is visible when viewed in total. There is an enormous amount of research showing the value of fathers and their contribution to their children's social competence, sense of well-being, academic performance and much more. It is very possible that one of the reasons involved fathers make such a tremendous contribution is that a child who has positive experiences with two parents learns two ways of interacting with the world instead of just one. A child with two involved parents learns there are at least two ways to handle situations and also ends up with a set of tools in their toolbox for dealing with the world instead of just one.

This is also why it is valuable for parents to try to shift their parenting style, for mothers to incorporate some of the typical paternal style and for fathers to adopt more of the typical maternal style. This will give your children not only an array of ways to deal with the world and all of its challenges, but will also show them that their reactions need not be based on their gender, but more on what actually works best in each situation.

Of course, children who have more tools at their disposal are better at social situations. Of course, children who have been interacted with in different ways by their parents are then able to interact in different ways with other people. Of course, children who have been intellectually stimulated by different parents in different ways, are better able to handle intellectual challenges than children who didn't have that experience.

Of course an involved father makes a difference. But it is the combination of involved mothers and fathers and their unique styles that make the biggest difference for children and their future health and happiness.

Many fathers don't really know what to do when they become a father. They don't know how they are supposed to be. Or maybe they don't really believe how much of a difference they make and think it doesn't really matter what they do. What I have found that works for many fathers in between the time their baby is born and when they really feel comfortable as a father is the idea of stepping into a role. When fathers understand their role, think about what their children need from them and try to be what their children need, they play the role of daddy. Incredibly, it doesn't take long for them to play the role of daddy before it becomes quite natural for them. But it developed because they were able to step into the role of daddy before they really felt comfortable in it.

I Am Their Daddy; Their Daddy Is Me

One of the most important tricks I have learned being a father is that who I am doesn't matter nearly as much as the fact that I am my children's father. This is something many men struggle with – my father was one of them. He never really understood the difference between how he saw himself and how my sister and I saw him. One of the most important elements of being a father is understanding that having a child (or twins in my case) is like stepping into an incredibly unique role, separate from ourselves. Many men struggle with a lack of confidence as fathers. But those that understand that the role of a father is bigger than themselves end up having a stronger, healthier relationship with their children.

In the beginning, when my children were babies, I felt extremely inadequate as a father. I felt this way for a number of reasons, but in the end none of them really mattered. I didn't feel comfortable as a father and thus struggled to be the kind of father I wanted to be. I am certain this is how my own father felt. His lack of confidence and comfort in the role of father was only made worse by the fact that he was the primary breadwinner. His job took him away from the house and he had little practice being a father. Soon he began to believe that since his children were getting along just fine without him, we didn't need him, that he had nothing to contribute. He never was comfortable with the father role, because he was never all that comfortable with himself.

“What can I give them that their mother can't give?” I can picture him thinking. “Why would what I say really matter to them?”

I felt the same way. In fact, I still do sometimes. But one of the biggest differences between myself and my father is I understood the power of parents better than he ever did. I didn't have much more confidence than my Dad did, but I was able to shift my perspective, I was able to see that what my children's father did was important to them. That is the key.

When I leave for work in the morning, it is easy to believe my children won't care. But do children care when their father leaves for work? Of course they do.

When they want to show me something, sure, they may very well be doing it because their mother asked them to. But do children care whether their father admires their drawings? Absolutely.

When I am sitting next to them and they are completely absorbed in the television, it is easy to believe it doesn't really matter whether I sit next to them or not, whether I put my arm around them or not. But don't children want and need love and affection from their Daddy? They certainly do.

I am their Daddy. Their Daddy is me.



In this new family math, whether I feel like my attention, my love, my time has real value or worth, the fact that I am their Daddy makes all that I do and say extremely important to my children. You know what? That is awfully scary, the power of parenting. But it has helped me do things I never thought I could do, it has helped me be more than myself, because in the end it is not about me, it is about my children and trying to help them be as healthy and happy as humanly possible.

One of the reasons I was able to shift my perspective, to realize this new math, was that I kept thinking about what I wanted, but never got, from my father when I was growing up. When I would ask him to play catch, he often did not have time. He probably thought it wasn't a big deal, he probably thought he wasn't that much fun anyway. I felt he didn't want to be with me, to play with me, to spend time with me. I don't want my children feeling that way - especially since it isn't true. When I am feeling drained, overwhelmed or even depressed, I try to remember that when my kids ask me to do something with them. I can't do everything, of course, but it helps me to remember their feelings - even if I can't do what they want, I can at least give them a good explanation and help them see it has nothing to do with them or how I feel about them at all.

The times I have the most trouble being able to maintain this perspective are All About Mommy moments, times when my children are fighting each other to climb on top of Mommy, to spend every moment with her, to both hold her hand while I stand there feeling like an idiot. I hate these times and I immediately begin to forget my role and begin to believe what I say and do doesn't matter. It's hard to remember my "parental power" when they don't want to hold my hand or sit with me on the train because they

would rather be with Mommy. Usually, it is my wife who helps pull me out of it, reminding me that this is only temporary and really has nothing to do with me at all. Often I end up just needing a little time to myself or one of my children will all of a sudden remember that they like me, too, and that helps.

But being able to understand my role as a father, as Daddy to my children, has given me the freedom to stretch beyond the confines of my personality, beyond my upbringing, beyond myself, to better be what my children need me to be. This in turn has made me feel more comfortable about not only being a father but with myself as well so that I have become the role, the Daddy, instead of just pretending.

I hope you understand by now how much power you have as a parent, as a father, with your children. One of the most incredible experiences for me as a father was realizing that I could be the solution to some of their problems – especially sleep. The more we are able to reach out to our children, to show them how much we love them in different and unique ways, we will find ourselves surprised by how much it affects them.

Making Note of My Parental Power

Our parental power is not something that comes up in casual conversation when we're complaining about how out of control our children have become. In contrast, many parents talk about how powerless they feel. But regardless of what we feel, we parents have tremendous power.

Parental power is another way of thinking about the influence we have over our children. Our children – especially our toddlers and early school-age children – see us as the model for being a man or woman, for being human. What we think, what we say, how we treat them defines how they think of themselves, how they view other people, and the health of their relationships. They strive for our attention, our acknowledgement, our love. We have an enormous impact on their lives, which for many of us can be rather frightening. Mostly we think of it negatively – what if we screw up? But our parental power can also be used for good, for helping our children get through challenging times.

The power I have as a parent became very clear recently in dealing with my three year-old son who has had enormous difficulty falling asleep (without screaming, crying and banging on the door) and sleeping through the night. My wife and I have tried literally hundreds of things to help our children, especially Elijah, sleep through the night. I joke that we are currently working on Plan R because Plans A through Q didn't work out so well – and that's only from when we started counting. The only one that had any real lasting effect on my children was the concept of happy thoughts. However, in the past couple of weeks something else has had a powerful impact on whether my children sleep through the night. It is my leaving them a note.

I have the pleasure (and sometimes the frustration) of putting my children to bed every night. I have often believed that one of the reasons my son has had such a difficult time with going to sleep is separation anxiety. He doesn't get to see me much during the day because I have to work and then I put him to bed at night, leaving him in the dark. Even worse, when he would have trouble sleeping, he would often wake up early to find me still at home, but when he slept well, I was already on the train, gone. I never would get a chance to tell him how great he did when he slept well.

One morning, after Elijah had a very good night going to sleep and didn't wake up upset during the night, I had the idea of leaving a note. I found some construction paper and some fabric markers and wrote him a note – including a stick figure (I am a terrible drawer – I can't even call myself an artist). Later that day, my wife told me he loved it – especially the terrible stick figure drawing. The incentive of the note encouraged Elijah

to go to sleep and sleep through the whole night without any problems for 10 straight nights and challenged me to keep coming up with new ways to say he slept through the night and new drawings for him to look at. Nothing else I have ever tried has worked that well (including bribery efforts). Even more interesting, the nights where I have forgotten to remind him about the note, he has had trouble sleeping, getting upset and banging on the door. But when I remembered to remind him about the possibility of a note if he fell asleep and slept well, he gave us not even a single peep. One morning he even woke up with a jolt saying, "I want my note. I get a note!" How incredible that something I write with fabric marker on construction paper with stick figures could hold such influence, such power for my child. It is terrifying and mind-boggling all at the same time.

I think many of us forget how much power we have because it is difficult for us to comprehend. I think underestimating our power leads us to not giving our children enough positive reinforcement. I know this experience with leaving notes has made me rethink a lot of what I do and say to my children. Maybe I don't need to reward them as much with material things as much as showing my love, my pride in what they have done and who they are. They mean the world to me and I think the world of them. They shouldn't have to guess that - they should always know and feel it.

Now they have one more thing every morning they can look at that reminds them of how I feel - even when I am not around.